



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

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TORAT

Parashat Vayigash

HAMELECH

Points to Ponder

1 – In this week's *parasha*, after ordering all of his servants to leave the room, Yosef reveals his true identity to his brothers. This must be understood, for our Sages ask in the Midrash how Yosef could have intentionally placed himself in mortal danger. After all, it must be suspected that after the brothers would be humiliated upon discovering the truth, that they would kill Yosef. Why, then, did Yosef order his servants to leave the room, leaving himself unguarded?

2 – The *Ohr Hachayim* asks how Yosef, over the course of the 22 years that he was in Egypt, not have sent a message to his father that he was alive. Perhaps we could understand that during the period of time that he was a servant to Potifar and when he was in jail, he was prevented from informing his father that he was alive. But after he rose to power, there is no doubt that he was able to send a messenger or a letter revealing to his father that he was alive. After all, there is no doubt that his disappearance caused his father much anguish. Why then, did Yosef not alleviate his father's pain?

3 – In next week's *parasha*, it states that Yaakov took ill and was soon to pass away, at which point Yosef was summoned. This implies that Yosef was not with his father at the time. This is astounding: Yosef was so close to his father, and his father was so close to him. Why, then, was he not visiting his father regularly, to the extent that when his father took ill, a messenger had to inform him?

4 – Our Sages furthermore ask about the episode with Tamar that was read about in *Parashat Vayeishev*. Why did she put herself in danger and

take so great a risk as to say that she was impregnated by the owner of the seal and wrap? Why did she not explicitly state that Yehudah was the father? By saying what she did, she placed Yehudah in a great trial where he would have to publicly admit his guilt. If not, she and her child would be burned. How could she do this?

The Right to Know

One of the foundations of the Jewish home is mutual respect. Unfortunately, human dignity is not very much valued in today's world. The media has no problem exposing misbehavior and publicizing misdeeds, invented or authentic. They even act self-righteous in doing so, insisting that the public has the right to know.

Time and time again, they take public figures and put them in the limelight, only to scrutinize their lives and deeds, for all to see and interpret.

This whole approach is so foreign to Torah ideals and practice, which demands that we seek to see our fellow in a positive light and we are obliged to judge him favorably.

Most of the publicizers have nothing more in mind than increasing their own sales and prestige, even at the price of totally ruining the lives and reputations of hardworking public figures. This whole atmosphere has its ugly effect upon the home as well, with each member pointing fingers and words at other family members, drawing attention to faults instead of stressing the good in others. This is most certainly detrimental to family harmony and sews the seeds of dissension and strife.

A most basic responsibility to family demands that each family member protect the dignity of his



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and her spouse/parent/child. That is the road to respect, love and unity.

Yosef Endangers His Life

Now we can explain our *parasha*. Our Sages wrote in the Midrash Tanchuma (*Vayigash* 5), "Said Rebbi Shmuel bar Nachman: Yosef entered a dangerous predicament. If his brothers would kill him, there would not be anyone in the world who would know about it. Why, then, did he say, 'Remove everyone from before me.' Rather, This is what Yosef said in his heart, 'It is better that I get killed, and not embarrass my brothers in front of the Egyptians.'"

The Torah is teaching us a lesson: even though Yosef could have justified himself by saying that it is only proper and just for him to be guarded from danger, nevertheless, he first and foremost was concerned over his brothers' honor. In his *sefer Ohr Yahel*, R' Leib Chasman *zt"l* adds that even though Yosef's entire hope in life was to see his father, and his father's life depended on him, and it was already 22 years that he had been waiting each and every moment to see his father, nevertheless, he decided that it was more important not to embarrass another individual. He was therefore prepared to be killed so that he should not embarrass them.

The *Ohr Hachayim's* Explanation

In *Parashat Vayigash* (45:26), the *Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh* asks why Yosef, who was so beloved to his father, allowed him to suffer for 22 years. Why did he not send a messenger to reveal to his father that he was alive and living in Egypt? Even if during the period of time that he was a servant he was prevented from informing his father that he was alive, but after he rose to power, there is

no doubt that he was able to do so. Even though this was decreed from Heaven, we must still understand Yosef's behavior.

The *Ohr Hachayim* therefore explains that Yosef suspected that if his father would know that he was in Egypt, he would ascertain that his brothers sold him, and perhaps he would be angry at them and curse them. Yosef did not want to cause them pain and damage, and he therefore did not reveal his status to his father for 22 years, not even sending a letter. This is according to what our Sages have said (*Berachot* 43b), "It is better for man to throw himself into a fiery furnace and not to embarrass his friend."

Yosef Did Not Visit His Father

Our Sages furthermore state (*Pesikta Rabbati* 3) on the *pasuk*, "And Yosef was told, 'Your father is ill.'" They ask that since Yosef held respecting his father on such a high level, why did he did not visit him regularly, to the extent that if he would not have been told that his father was sick, he would not have known? This is meant to teach us about Yosef's righteousness. He did not wish to be alone with his father, so that he would not express his dissent over what his brothers did to him and curse them. Yosef knew the level of his father's righteousness, and that anything he said was decreed. He told Lavan that whoever took his idols would die, and therefore Rachel, his mother, died. Yosef was therefore fearful that Yaakov would curse the *Shevatim*, and that this would cause the destruction of the entire world, because the world was created for the *Shevatim*. Therefore, he did not regularly visit his father.

We see from here to what extent Yosef was willing to forgo fulfilling the mitzvah of respecting his father, enjoying his company, and learning



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from his wisdom and Torah after yearning for him for so many years. Even though he now had the opportunity to spend time with him, he forwent it all, because he suspected that it might cause harm to his brothers. Absolutely amazing.

Why Did Yosef Not Grab His Garment?

We also find Yosef acting similarly in the episode with Potifar's wife. The Torah states that she grabbed Yosef's garment, and he fled outside, leaving it in her hand. She later used this as false evidence to accuse Yosef of immorality. The Ramban (*Bereishit* 39:12) asks why Yosef did not take the garment from her, so that she could not accuse him. He answers that he did not do so out of respect, since he worked for her. He therefore did not wish to take the garment forcefully. She therefore removed it from him, for it was a form of coat and turban. When she saw that he had left the garment in her hand, she feared that Yosef would reveal her attempt to the members of the household or to her husband. She therefore preempted him by saying that he had removed the garment to lie with her, and when he saw that she screamed, he got scared and fled. One who contemplates this matter will be amazed that even at such a time of distress, when Yosef knew that he would be taken to jail to sit in a pit in harsh conditions, far away from his parents – even then he thought about the honor of his employer. He did not wish to embarrass her and therefore did not take the garment out of her hand.

After Yosef Fleed

Furthermore, the *pasuk* relates, "And he [-Yosef] fled, and went outside." The Seforno asks what the reason is for this double expression in the

Torah. The *pasuk* could have simply stated, "And he fled outside?" The Seforno explains that he first fled from the room that she was in, so that his *yetzer hara* would not overpower him. However, once he was out of danger, he went out into the street slowly, so as not to draw attention from passersby who would ask him why he was fleeing and who was chasing him. For then he would be forced to relate the story, and he did not wish to embarrass her. He therefore went outside slowly, unlike one who is fleeing another.

Tamar's Behavior

We also find that Tamar was prepared to be burned in order not to embarrass Yehudah. Our Sages state in *Bava Metzia* (59a) as well as in *Berachot* (43b) that she did not want to embarrass him by saying, "You fathered the child." Rather, she exclaimed, "To the one whom these items belong, I was impregnated." She said, "If he admits on his own, let him do so, but if not, let them burn me, and I will not embarrass him." From here, our Sages learn that it is better for an individual to throw himself into a fiery furnace and not to embarrass his friend publicly.

Tamar knew the great loss that would befall the Jewish Nation if she would be taken out and burned. However, she preferred that she and her child be burned – but the main thing was not to embarrass another Jew. The reason for this is because by embarrassing another Jew, an individual loses his portion in the World to Come. This is as it states in *Masechet Avot* (3:11), "Rebbi Eliezer Hamodai said: One who embarrasses his friend in public ... even though in his hand are Torah and good deeds, he has no portion in the World to Come."



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Story of Mar Ukva

Additionally, it states in *Masechet Ketuvot* (67b) how Mar Ukva gave *tzedakah* each morning to a pauper, placing it under his door. One day, the pauper waited until the money was put inside his door, and then he opened it to see who gave it to him. Mar Ukva fled and entered an oven filled with burning coals, so that the pauper would not be embarrassed by discovering who gave him *tzedakah* each and every day. Now, Mar Ukva did not wrong the pauper; he did not embarrass him and certainly did not embarrass him publicly. On the contrary, he was secretly performing an act of kindness for him, and it was the pauper who wished to see the benefactor. It was he, therefore, who was causing embarrassment to himself – how then does this bear any similarity to one who embarrasses his friend publicly? However, Mar Ukva is teaching us something even deeper; even if he would not be at fault for causing the disgrace or embarrassment to his friend – rather, he would only be a partner in the act – it is still preferable to throw himself into a fiery furnace and not to embarrass his friend publicly. This is truly extraordinary.

Respect the Thief

We also see other instances in which the Torah ascribes great significance to *kavod habriot* – human dignity. For example, one who steals and slaughters an ox pays five times as much as the value of the ox. But one who does so to his fellow's sheep pays only four times as much. Why the difference?

Explains Rabbi Yochanan that the thief already suffered humiliation as he trudged through the streets carrying a sheep on his shoulders. Oxen just walk along. The Torah takes into

consideration this blow to a man's dignity, although self-imposed and done as a criminal act. We are to learn from here to do our utmost to respect others.

Bilaam and the Donkey

When Bilaam went to curse the Jews, he rode upon his donkey and was stopped by an angel. The donkey miraculously opened its mouth and spoke to Bilaam, reprimanding him for his behavior. At the end of the scene, the angel slew the donkey. Why? To protect Bilaam's dignity! So that no one would later see it and comment, "Oh, that is the donkey who put Bilaam in his place."

Here is Bilaam, a villain, an archenemy of the Jewish People, and his dignity is still protected from On High.

Will You Speak?

A certain Yeshivah sent its *mashgiach* abroad on a fundraising attempt. In the meantime, the administration turned to Rav Shalom Schwadron to deliver a *mussar shmuess* instead of the *mashgiach*. Rav Shalom had his hesitations. He knew that he was endowed with a particular style of delivery, appreciated by most audiences. Therefore, he feared that were he to speak at that particular Yeshiva, the *bochurim* might come to compare his *shmuess* with those of their *mashgiach* and speak derogatorily about their *mashgiach*.

So Rav Shalom went to ask Reb Chatzkel Levenstein what to do. Rav Chatzkel answered that in order to prevent a Jew from feeling bad or inferior, one should give up even on an opportunity to build the *Beit Hamikdash*!



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Rav Shalom understood that he was to turn down the offer.

Salty Tea

When R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin *zt"l* would deliver his daily *shiur* to his students, his loyal attendant would always bring him a cup of tea in middle of the *shiur* to strengthen him, as he was very weak. Since he suffered from a chronic low sugar count, the attendant was accustomed to always place several spoons of sugar in the tea, so that his sugar count remained normal. One day, the students heard that R' Diskin's wife was very upset and disturbed. They therefore asked her what was the matter. She explained that on the side of the water urn was a jar of salt instead of sugar. Therefore, it seemed that the attendant erred and placed salt in the tea instead of sugar. This was very dangerous for R' Diskin, because he needed a lot of sugar and, instead, he received salt. The students answered that they did not notice any difference on the Rav's face when he drank the tea. She must have made a mistake, and the tea was, in fact, sweetened with sugar. However, they later clarified that, indeed, the tea was very salty, as his wife had suspected. Everyone was amazed – how did they not notice any change on the Rav's face? The students entered and asked how he did that, for it was endangering his life to drink salty tea. R' Diskin responded, "Is it not an explicit Gemara which states, 'It is better for an individual to throw himself into a fiery furnace and not to shame his friend publicly?'" It is clear from here that it was forbidden for me to publicly shame the attendant for placing salt in my tea instead of sugar" (*She'al Avicha Va'yagedcha*).

Those Two Sisters

There were once two sisters who each got married but led different lifestyles. One lived in peace and harmony, but in abject poverty. The other was well-off, her home a mansion.

Due to their different levels in society, they hardly had what to do with each other. But when the poor sister's daughters reached marriageable age and they could not provide a suitable dowry, shidduch suggestions were not really coming.

At that, she decided to visit her well-to-do sister; perhaps she would help. Mrs. Poorthing went to her sister's mansion for her first time. She cautiously knocked on the door and the butler answered. She asked to meet with the woman of the home and the butler asked if she had an appointment. Mrs. Poorthing said, "Tell her that her sister is at the door."

The butler returned and granted her entrance. She was shown through several long corridors, her mouth gaping at the exposition of astounding wealth. She was finally ushered into a room with thick carpet and comfortable cushioned armchairs. She was happy to see her sister, but appalled at her distraught appearance.

She had come to seek help; instead she asked her sister, "Are you unwell? You do not seem to be managing."

Her wealthy sister sobbed, telling of how all this wealth is meaningless as she is treated like a doll in the breakfront. Her opinion is ignored and overlooked. She is given no respect. Her life is miserable.

Mrs. Poorthing left the meeting feeling bad for her sister, but so happy for herself. She realized that harmony with meager sustenance and



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humble living quarters is worth far more than jewel-studded misery.

Not My Cup of Tea

In my travels abroad, I had an appointment in the house of a wealthy man in an expensive neighborhood in Manhattan. A uniformed staff was on hand to tend to every need. Nonetheless, when it came time to serve the guests, the master of the home barked at his wife to bring tea. When the tea was brought by the pale faced, distraught wife, the master asked us, "Do you want sugar or sugar-free sweetener?"

His wife commented, "I already put in sugar."

At that, he exploded and shouted at her, "What?! How dare you ruin the guests' tea before finding out how they want it!"

I tried to calm the atmosphere, saying, "It's fine, I wanted sugar anyway." But he kept going on in his disparaging tirade.

It was a terrible sight to see.

The Door to Repentance

One day, a young Kollel fellow approached me with a question in halachah. He added that he is only frum because of me. Why? Well, he had been an irreligious worker for a door installation company. A few years ago, we had a new door put in and he had spent a number of hours in our home, taking measurements and doing the actual installation.

This irreligious fellow could not get over the mutual respect between husband and wife in a religious home. He was used to shouting, disparaging and cursing, and here he saw smiles, soft and pleasing tones, encouragement, respect and support.

At once, he decided to look into a religious lifestyle and what it involved. Before long, he did a full teshuvah, learned in yeshivah and kollel and built a Torah home. All thanks to viewing mutual respect and family harmony.

Peaceful Conclusion

In conclusion, let us learn the importance of preserving the dignity of others. Our Sages teach (Yevamot 62b): One who loves his wife like himself and honors her more than himself, etc., of him it is said, "And you shall know that your abode is peaceful etc." Rambam brings this in Hilchot Ishut, Chapter 15, and also adds words of direction to the devoted wife: Our Sages have instructed each woman to respect her husband very much and to revere him and to conduct all of her actions based upon his word. She should view him as an officer or king, provide for him his every whim and distance all that he despises. This is the approach of Jewish men and ladies who build holy and pure relationships with each other. Those who follow these directions will dwell pleasantly and admirably.

The Rambam is teaching us the importance of mutual respect as the cornerstone of marital harmony. We have seen in this article other examples as well as to the significance which the Torah ascribes to this all-important ideal in general.

Let us do what we can to protect the dignity of others. Thus, we will be worthy recipients of the blessing: (Shmuel I:25) Peace unto you, peace unto your household, peace unto all which is associated with you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka